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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001969

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: CHANDRIKA BIDS FAREWELL

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Outgoing Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (CBK) hosted a dinner for the diplomatic corps on November 16, the evening before the election which would determine her successor. About 100 guests--the entire diplomatic corps, including multilateral and UN agency heads, plus various Sri Lankans who have been close to her, such as Peace Secretariat Head Jayantha Dhanapala and Special Adviser Mano Tittewella--attended. Showing that she was not going to change her style simply because her Presidential tenure was ending, CBK showed up for her 8 o'clock party at 9:25.

2. (C) As guests took their places for dinner sometime around 10:30, Ambassador was seated directly at CBK's left hand, UK High Commissioner at her right, and Norwegian Ambassador directly across at the head table. CBK commented: "Well, wouldn't the bearded fellows (i.e., the JVP) have a fit if they saw this." Throughout the dinner, Kumaratunga opined on various subjects:

--"My only regret is that if my party's Presidential candidate (Mahinda Rajapakse) wins, he may destroy everything I have tried to do in the last 11 years."

--Kumaratunga said she had heard the theory about a month ago that the LTTE wanted Rajapakse to win, calculating that Rajapakse's own beliefs, coupled with the ideas of his Sinhala chauvinist allies the JVP and JHU, would show the world that the Tamil demand for independence was justified. Now, following the LTTE call for Tamils not to vote, she began to wonder if that theory was correct. She also thought the LTTE might use paid Sinhalese agents to cause problems after Rajapakse won--burning churches, attacking Tamils etc.--to further bolster their cause. This could lead to "UDI" -- a unilateral declaration of independence.

--She confirmed press reports that one of Rajapakse's brothers, a former Sri Lankan Army officer now resident in the US, had planned to fly up to Jaffna along with 300 Army deserters labeled as "election observers." She had personally ordered this movement blocked.

--She had reached agreement with UNP Presidential candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe that if he won, she could stay as President through November 23, when the armed forces were planning a send-off ceremony. (Under the Sri Lankan constitution, the winning candidate can be sworn in any time after the election, and must do so within 14 days.) She hoped that Rajapakse would grant her the same courtesy.

--She did not have any firm plans yet for her post-Presidency life. "I want to just relax for the first year." Ranil had offered her whatever position she wanted afterward, and wanted the two parties to cooperate in governing. Her reply: "I've been offering that to you for the last 10 years. It's too bad you didn't take it up."

--She does not know where she will live. The security forces have told her that her personal house is not secure, as it is overlooked by a number of other buildings. The government is readying a house for her, but it will not be finished for a while. "Perhaps I will just live in the street."

3. (C) COMMENT: I had expected a more emotional, perhaps even lachrymose Chandrika at this moment. Instead, she was subdued and a bit reflective, and certainly making no attempt to hide her opinions. She made no effort to hide her disdain for her own party's candidate. She no doubt hopes that a Ranil Wickremasinghe victory will allow her some continuing role in Sri Lankan public life. End Comment.

LUNSTEAD